

JEFFERSON PAPERS.

MEMORIAL

OF

THOMAS JEFFERSON RANDOLPH, OF VIRGINIA,

IN REGARD

*To the purchase and publication by Congress of the manuscripts of Mr. Jefferson.*

DECEMBER 30, 1847.

Read, and laid on the table.

*To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:*

The petition of Thomas J. Randolph, of Virginia, respectfully represents: That, by the last will of Thomas Jefferson, formerly President of the United States, he became the sole devisee of his manuscript papers; for the more ready comprehension of the value and magnitude of which, he begs to refer to the accompanying report, No. 39, House of Representatives, 29th Congress, 2d session. He feels deeply the responsibility of the trust confided to him. His own fortune being inadequate to their publication, their liability to mutilation, destruction, and loss, upon his death, induce him to offer them to the Congress of the United States for a consideration they may deem adequate. He asks the consideration of the subject, with the accompanying papers as part of his memorial.

TH. J. RANDOLPH.

JANUARY 20, 1847.

Mr. BRODHEAD, from the Committee on the Library, made the following

REPORT:

*The Joint Committee on the Library, to whom the memorial of Thomas Jefferson Randolph was referred, praying that Congress would purchase the manuscript papers of the late Thomas Jefferson, formerly President of the United States, and of which papers he, the said Thomas Jefferson Randolph, is the devisee and proprietor, have had the same under consideration, and beg leave to report:*

That these papers consist, in part, of official, political, scientific, and miscellaneous letters, amounting, as it appears from a well kept and perfectly preserved journal in the handwriting of Mr. Jefferson himself, to

the number of about forty-two thousand, many of which were written to and received from the most distinguished men of his time and country. Of the number written by himself, namely, about sixteen thousand, eight hundred only have been published in the printed volumes which are entitled "The Memoirs and Correspondence of Thomas Jefferson;" and these, as the committee understand, were not selected for publication because they were deemed the most interesting and valuable, but were so selected, in a great degree, upon other grounds.

Besides these letters, there are three thick quarto volumes of MSS., which are thus described by Mr. Jefferson in a paper in his own handwriting, to wit:

*"Explanations of three volumes bound in marbled paper."*

"In these three volumes will be found copies of the official opinions given in writing by me to General Washington, while I was Secretary of State, with sometimes the documents belonging to the case. Some of these are the rough draughts, some press copies, some fair ones. In the earlier part of my acting in that office, I took no other note of the passing transactions; but, after awhile, I saw the importance of doing it, in aid of my memory. Very often, therefore, I made memorandums on loose scraps of paper taken out of my pocket in the moment, and laid by to be copied fair at leisure; which, however, they hardly ever were. These scraps, therefore, ragged, rubbed and scribbled as they were, I had bound with the others, by a binder who came into my cabinet, did it under my own eye, and without the opportunity of reading a single paper. At this day, (February 4th, 1818,) after the lapse of twenty-five years or more from their dates, I have given to the whole a calm revisal, when the passions of the time are passed away, and the reasons of the transactions act alone on the judgment. Some of the informations I had recorded are now cut out from the rest, because I have seen that they were incorrect or doubtful, or merely personal or private, with which we have nothing to do.

"TH. JEFFERSON.

"FEBRUARY 4, 1818."

Of these volumes, thus described by Mr. Jefferson, it is understood by the committee that a portion, not exceeding sixty pages octavo, and having no higher interest than the rest, has heretofore been published.

In addition to the foregoing, the committee have received from the memorialist a long catalogue of other manuscript matter, connected more or less with the official position and duties of Mr. Jefferson—namely, his reports, with the materials upon which they were founded; notes of cabinet councils during his own administration of the government; papers relating to early treaties with France—revolutionary papers; some of which are marked by himself as "valuable," and not elsewhere to be found; and much other matter of a scientific and miscellaneous character.

The arrangement of these manuscripts is chronological and systematic; and the condition, as exemplified by specimens presented to the committee, perfectly sound. A portion of them, and an inconsiderable portion only, as it is believed, has been published.

As the consequence of the extraordinary labor and system with which Mr. Jefferson appears, during the whole course of his long and active life,

to have made and preserved a written record of every important matter to which his thoughts or his duties were directed, the manuscripts which are now offered to Congress are not only unexampled in the variety and volume, as compared with other manuscripts which have heretofore been offered, but correspond in all respects, as the committee have reason to believe, with the services, the stations, and the renown of their author. These manuscripts the memorialist informs the committee he is unable to publish on his own account, and is determined not to commit to the mutilation and caprice of others, who would undertake their publication with a view only to pecuniary profit. It is evident, therefore, that, between the inability of the memorialist on the one hand, and his rightful determination on the other to protect the character and the labors of his great ancestor from prejudice and public misuse, these valuable papers will be lost, or worse than lost, unless the government itself shall interpose to preserve them. This it has already done, as the committee think, in several other cases; but in no case did the necessity or the expediency of its action have stronger or better grounds than in the present one. The committee are therefore of opinion that—whether the precedents in similar cases, or the great volume, variety, or interest of the manuscripts themselves be considered, or whether the character and services of their illustrious author, and the deep and permanent influence over our doctrines and system of government, which have resulted, and will ever result, from his political opinions and acts, be taken into view—it is fit and right that the government should possess itself of all his unpublished papers, and thus forever preserve them against any danger of misapplication and loss.

To carry out these views the committee herewith report a bill.

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A BILL authorizing the purchase and publication of the papers and manuscripts of the late Thomas Jefferson.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby, appropriated out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, to be paid to Thomas Jefferson Randolph, the grandson and executor of the late Thomas Jefferson, for all the papers and manuscripts of his said grandfather: *Provided,* That the said Thomas Jefferson Randolph shall deposit all the said papers and manuscripts of a public nature in the State Department, and execute a conveyance to the United States therefor.

SEC. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That the Joint Committee on the Library be authorized to cause the Jefferson papers and manuscripts mentioned in the foregoing section, or such portions thereof as the said committee shall think proper to make public, to be printed and published; and that a sum not exceeding six thousand dollars be appropriated for that purpose out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated.

